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AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR OVERSEAS AID

(INCORPORATED IN THE ACT)

ACFOA HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE
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Memo : re recent visit to Indonesia
To : friends of East Timor
Date : 25 June 1990
From : Pat Walsh

I was in Indonesia, May 14-30, for a meeting of the Indonesia Australia Program for Cooperation (IAPC), of which I am secretary (at the Australian end), and took the opportunity to do some work on East Timor in Jakarta and Central Java, the two areas I visited during my brief stay.

My report can be summarised under the following headings :

1. Prisoners

On Wednesday, 23 May, I made a memorable visit to Cipinang prison in North Jakarta. The visit was to join the Christian prisoners to celebrate the Feast of the Ascension which, oddly enough, is a public holiday in Indonesia. Among the 200 prisoners who attended the extremely devout, informal and enthusiastic service, were six Timorese political prisoners:

1. David Dias Ximenes, 15 year sentence
2. Mario Bonaparte Soares, 16 year sentence
3. Albino Lourdes, 17 year sentence
4. Ze Roberto Geronimo Miranda, 12 year sentence
5. Domingo Seixas, 12 year sentence
6. Marito dos Reis, 17 year sentence

The other Timorese who were imprisoned in Cipinang have finished their term and, with one or two exceptions, have returned to East Timor.

Though forbidding from the outside with its high thick concrete walls, steel plate entrance and guard towers, Cipinang is something of a surprise on the inside. Gardens and lawns are neatly kept and those guards I saw were not armed. No guards attended the service. I sat amongst the prisoners, a PKI death row prisoner to my left and a Fretilin prisoner to my right, and had a good chat. Everyone wore their Sunday best! The service was followed by a small picnic in the chapel garden which was equally relaxed despite the presence of the Superintendent of Political Prisoners, a burly but chummy sort of chap.

I explained to the East Timorese the situation in Australia and AETA's financial support for them and talked about the international scene of which they were well informed. They requested me several times to convey their appreciation and thanks to the Timorese community in Australia and Australian friends.

Their main requests were as follows:

1. They want to serve out the rest of their sentences in East Timor. The diminished size of their group in Cipinang, and distance from home, family

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and community, makes them feel lonely and homesick. They asked that requests in support of their wishes be directed to ICRC and our respective governments.

2. They need on-going financial support particularly to buy medicine not available from the prison hospital (Donations can be made available C/- the Australia East Timor Prisoners Fund, PO Box 93, Fitzroy Vic 3065, Australia).

3. They would appreciate small contributions of books in Portuguese and/or English for the prison library. Biographies, theology, history, novels, and selected political works are welcome. Donations can be made through the ACFOA Human Rights Office which will arrange to courier them to Jakarta.

I passed on $300.00 from the AETA Prisoners Fund to the organisation which cares for the Timorese detainees.

2. Video

A copy of Buried Alive was taken to Jakarta, converted to Betamax and money was left for additional copies to be made for distribution to other centres in Java, Bali and East Timor. Needless to say, the video was greeted with great excitement and enthusiasm by Timorese in Jakarta.

3. Students

There are several hundred East Timorese students studying at tertiary level at various centres in Java and Bali, including Jakarta, Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Salatiga, Malang and Denpasar. I met with members of the student committee in Denpasar, Salatiga and Jakarta.

The largest group (some 300) is concentrated in Bali where most attend Udayana state university. Most of these are young men who study law and economics and receive government scholarships described as generous compared to those received by Indonesian students. They live close to one another in an area near the university. They have their own Timorese soccer, volley ball and basketball teams and generally get on well with other students who, however, don't get too involved with them because they are seen as 'political'.

No one is officially 'in charge' of them either from the government or the church, though government and church peolpe from East Timor visit occasionally. The Catholic Bishop in Bali visited on one occasion (they suspect on the military's initiative) but they bluntly told him they wanted nothing more to do with him after he lectured them on the lack of development in East Timor and the importance of integration PMKRI (the Indonesian Catholic Student Movement) were likewise shown the door after a similarly patronising overture.

Relations with the police and military are not good. It was not easy to establish clearly why this is so, but it certainly has a lot

to do with the students political activities (e.e. the incidents involving the church referred to above, thr students letter to the U.N. Secretary General supporting Bishop Belo, their letter to President Soares re the Timor Gap, etc.). Thie is compounded by the size and 'visibility' of the Timorese who obviously stick together in cirsumstances they regard as alien

Two recent clashes highlight the seriousness of tensions with the authorities on 27 December last. A Timorese left a big Timorese birthday party on his motorbike to get cigarettes. On his way back to the party, according to the students, five plainclothes police stopped the student and ordered him to take each of them home in turn. When he refused they beat him and challenged him to fetch his friends. The partying Timorese gladly accepted the challenge, a street fight ensued, police and military were called in.

Thie police provocation is the background to the arrests and beating of these Timorese students in Denpasar, 28 April (see ACFOA memo of 3 May 1990, already circulated). The students concerned, viz. Fernao Trinidade, Felisberto Mascarenhas and Mario Trinidade, have since been released and have resumed their studies.

The Bali group claim 100% support and unity of their colleagues. They believe their scholarships will be reduced or terminated if their political activities continue.

They welcome visits by travellers and request financial support for their activities. Unity and militancy are not however features of the East Timorese student scene in the lovely university town of Salatiga in Central Java - though this is not to say there are no committed or active people amongst the 40 or so small comminuty (of mostly males). During a brief visit I was invited to speak to the Timorese campus group on Australian-Indonesian NGO relations. Despite resolute and repeated warnings by the Timorese chairman, underscored by pointed body language directed at a couple of known stirrers down the back, that both speaker and audience should avoid anything political, it quickly became clear during question time that the main preoccupation was East Timor, not the subtleties of NGO relations. In particular the group wanted help to understand something that clearly bothered and bewildered them viz. Australias relations with Indonesia particularly in the context of the Timor Gap Treaty. Amongst the other thoughtful questions posed were two that struck me as particularly interesting : how was it Australia was able to accommodate a diverse range of cultures without abuses of human rights? What were the possibilities for NGOs in East Timor?

Following the two asylum bids (1985 and 1989) and other political activity it appears the authorities have reduced Timorese student numbers in Jakarta. The most active are the three who sought to leave Indonesia through the Dutch Embassy in 1985. One is now married with two children, and though obtaining regular employment is difficult because of their political and legal status, they survive thanks to the support of friends and intermittent income from spot jobs. To improve his chances one has done an electronics technical course. Even so, spot work is not easy to get. One told me that a parish priest said he could only help him with work if he ceased political activity and accepted the Timor status quo,

conditions the desperate job seeker totally (and bluntly) rejected.

Also in Jakarta are one or two Timorese ex-political prisoners, including Paulino Gama (Mauk Muruk) formerly a Fretlin guerilla commander. His Bio-data is included in the accompanying papers. A new newsletter is also being produced in Jakarta called Suara Maubere di bawah senjata musuh (Maubere Voice under Enemy Guns) and written in Bahasa Indonesia, its first edition is dated April 1990.

Funds for rent and the political program are once again urgently required.

4. The Church and Human Rights

I had several substantial discussions regarding need for regular systematic and credible information on the human rights situation in East Timor. This was raised in the context of a possible international church initiative to fund, support and implement a human rights watch program in East Timor in collaboration with the East Timor church. The initiative is proposed as a concrete response and follow-up to the visit of Pope John Paul II last October.

Discussions were held with Timorese, with Indonesian Church people and NGOs and with individual Indonesians. There was general agreement on the need to significantly upgrade reporting on East Timor (and to include Indonesians as recipients) and, two, on the central responsibility of the local church in this process. There is also a strong view that it is not politically, morally or practically feasible for Indonesian NGOs to undertake this work in East Timor, though they accept and desire a more active advocacy role vis-a-vis Timor. It is recognised that, practical circumstances on the ground in East Timor to one side, the involvement of the East Timorese Church may well be decided by the Vatican.

The next step is for me to write a progress report on the proposal and to consult further with the Church in East Timor.

5. Indonesian perspectives on East Timor

Having spoken about East Timor to a range of Indonesian organisations and individuals over the years, I was struck on this occasion by the discernible and positive shift in attitudes on the question (at an NGO level of course).

Those contacted included a number of leading intellectuals, academics, Church people, oppositionists (Petition of 50), students, activists, and Indonesian NGOs.

They demonstrated a grasp of detail, level of concern, preparedness to act and, perhaps most refreshing of all, a relaxation and non-defensiveness of atttitude which not only made conversation on the matter thankfully easier but raised for the first time the feasibility of genuine cooperation down the track.

It is important not to overstate this phenomenon. It is not universal, they were talking to a known Timor activist and, in real terms, though Indonesia is enjoying a sort of political Indian summer and expanded free space at the moment, the enormous capacity of the system to clamp down remains fully intact and restrictive of political activity.

Nevertheless, I feel this shift in perspective is real and important. Given the appropriate circumstances and support, it is potentially a historic turning point in the East Timor issue.

Why this development? A number of factors have contributed such as long-term association with overseas Timor activists, facility with English, travel and so on. In more recent times, however, new elements have come into play such as the much publicised Papal visit to East Timor, travel to East Timor since the opening up (including academic access by the UGM team), interaction with Timorese in Java, and, not least, the glasnost phenomenon I referred to above. The latter, with all its limitations, has had a remarkable transforming effect on the spirit and outlook of many Indonesians most noticeably in the area of freedom of thought and expression and relations with foreigners.

A younger generation is also emerging who are thinking new thoughts and do not necessarily feel the same way about the unity of Indonesia etc. as the passing 45 generation whose chauvinism was shaped during the earlier struggle for independence.

Three implications for Timor work are immediately obvious:

1. Significant reports on East Timor should be translated into Bahasa Indonesia.
2. Indonesia should be a priority for Timor work which means in practice, for example, that East Timorese living in East Timor and Java will need to share information and their concerns with appropriate Indonesians.
3. An Indonesian solidarity network should be established.

Pat Walsh
June 1990